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ABSTRACT

The reading program of the future will have a form and function which is distinctive. It will have the shape and operations peculiar to the total context in which each teacher has to work. Generating meaning will be the primary focus of all language activities. Print will be introduced naturally and continuously used throughout all developmental stages. Future reading programs will be activity oriented, with ample opportunities for verbal, written and artistic expression. The teacher will teach most of the process strategies for reading in the environmental context. Molding and shaping of the best qualities of past and present programs into a new way of organizing and teaching will enhance program building. Teachers need a reorientation of their own perspectives and beliefs about reading and how it should be taught in order to select and fuse together ideas and techniques which are suitable for their own style. The teaching role becomes one of creating the environment and atmosphere, of leading students, mediating between them and the text, and being inductive in their approach. In this way, teachers will create an environment where reading becomes a discovery process. A program such as this can happen when and where teachers are given the freedom to create in a supportive environment. (One table of comparisons is included.) (MG)

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THE READING PROGRAM OF THE FUTURE

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Look about you now! You may see or may have seen the reading program of the future. The future is here now. It exists conceptually if not isomorphically in a few distantly isolated classrooms around the country. Lonely, but courageous, teachers are or have been taking risks in creating variations of the reading classroom of the future. It is to their credit that we can see the future today.

How can the reading program of the future be described? To answer that inquiry, eight questions will serve to guide our search for a solution: (1) What do we <u>want</u> in our reading programs? (2) What <u>characteristics</u> will the reading program of the future have? (3) What <u>features</u> will the program display? (4) What alternatives, past or present, can be used for selecting <u>features</u> of the evolving programs of tomorrow? (5) What changes in our <u>belief system</u> are necessary to build tomorrow's reading programs? (6) What are the <u>factors</u> necessary for a successful Discovery Reading Program? (7) What are the <u>objectives</u> for a Discovery Reading Program? and (8) What type of <u>rational teaching model</u> can be created for meeting the requirements of a reading program for the future?

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1. What do we <u>want</u> in our reading programs?

First, the reading program of the future is not likely to resemble the basal system approach of today. Any reading program without a basal system is likely to be idiosyncratic. Teachers will seize upon a set of compatible objectives to select the characteristics and the features of the program they want. Each program will have a form and function which is distinctive. It will have the shape and operations peculiar to the total context in which each teacher has to work. Other than using natural reading materials for teaching reading, teachers may not have a common set of common factors. Each situation is unique.

Second, we must try arduously to be clear in our wants - we might just get them. In the 1960's, a banner period for reading clinics, clinicians wanted detailed and specific analytical tests for diagnosing reading difficulties. These instruments were wanted for prescriptions that could be translated into specific instructional units. The commercially available tests simply did not afford such detail or if they produced a portion of such desired information, the tests were too complex to score and interpret. So clinicians made their own informal <u>criterion</u> tests - one of the forerunners of basal reader end-of-book level tests, management systems, and state assessment tests of the 70's and 80's. Did we reading people really get what we wanted?

So let's be clear in our desired objectives. The reading program of the future will likely want reading taught as a means of understanding, not reduced to a subject, but as a process that develops through use rather than as a specific "content" to be taught. The activity of reading, not instruction about reading, is a major goal of the reading programs of the future. Further, reading experiences should be ultimately tested by the criterion of whether those experiences are satisfying and enjoyable, in short, a rewarding happening!

In contrast to today's programs, the future reading programs most likely will want more connected reading for all readers, more writing in expressing their responses, more choice and variety in reading selections, more opportunities for internalization of language, and more personalization. This program will seek more integration of all language activities with increased alternatives for expression through the arts (drawing, painting, singing, dancing, pantomiming, etc.).

Of course, not all the techniques of today are undesirable. We should not throw the baby out with the bath water! There are some fine qualities in today's programs that we most surely would want to retain. Some of them are structure, direct teaching, and "skills" control (at least for a span of time until the public accepts the positive changes).

2. What characteristics will the program have?

Generating meaning will be the primary focus of all language activities, including reading. Students learn to read by reading. Students read to seek meaning for themselves and others. Youngsters learn to write by writing. Students write to express meaning to others and themselves. There must be something to read and write about - a need to give and get messages. Playing with language will be encouraged, i.e., invented spelling, jingles, homophone riddles, alliteration, etc. Reading and writing activities will be done for real and natural purposes.

Youngsters will be surrounded by books in the classroom as well as have access to the school library/media center. But books, while certainly a main ingredient in a reading diet, will hardly make a full balanced meal. The classroom reading environment will contain other natural reading materials: magazines, newspapers, reference sources, student published material, pamphlets, brochures, catalogues, telephone books, comic books, logos, written letters, coupons, forms, schedules (bus, train, airlines) and many other functional reading items.

Classroom management will likely take advantage of multi-leveling alternates depending upon the developmental stage of the reader. In some instances the teacher will read aloud to the whole class or a selected group, some children will be encouraged to "mumble read", others will listen and read along with a tape, while some will have internalized language and will read silently. There will be occasions for shared reading in

pairs, choral reading, and antiphonic reading. Options will be explored to match the reader to activities that are appropriate for their developmental status. The atmosphere of the classroom will foster mutual respect and trust, natural movement, interaction, and collaboration between the students and the teacher and each other. Reading does not have to be a solitary activity; social interaction will be encouraged. Children learn by themselves and with each other. There will be freedom with responsibility, choice and high expectations for success.

In the reading program of the future, print will be introduced naturally throughout the day and throughout all developmental stages. Content or knowledge structures will be organized and integrated into teaching units for structure and daily instructional plans. For example, decoding ("phonics") may be combined with spelling and vocabulary development, not in reading <u>per se</u>, but integrated with other instructional units where the focus is on the word. (Whereas, in reading, the emphasis should be on continuous connected texts.) Further, the words used for the focus on word instruction could be selected from a common knowledge domain: transportation, nutrition, music, hobbies, national events, etc. In reading narrative material, story maps could be developed based on story grammar. Text reduction and reconstruction activities according to text could foster development of comprehension in expository and informational selections.

Future reading programs will be activity oriented with ample opportunities for verbal, written, and artistic expression. The teacher will be both a model and a mediator, providing help and

guidance as needed. Reading errors will be regarded as a natural by-product of learning to read and accepted as part of the growth process. Teachers will be sensitive observers with an eye on the developmental stages of each reader.

3. What features will the program display?

The future reading programs will use the extensive print environment of the classroom, the school library/media materials, the teacher's books, books from home, reading materials suggested by and loaned from friends, and other print media in the community. The students in this vast print environment will search, sample, and confirm their own choices for reading. The program will let students discover early what the world is asking them to learn about themselves through choice-making activities. Do we by not allowing children to choose their own reading material foster "a-literacy" (they can read but won't read). What do we show youngsters about reading when we will not trust them enough to choose their own books?

Reading conferences once or twice a week will be held between the teacher and each student. The conferences will focus on how the book was selected, the reason for selection, the book's interest value, monitoring an oral sample, retellings and other items related to the focus under consideration. At the end of each book selection, the teacher will lead the student to the closure of purpose for that reading selection.

Focus lessons will be conducted regularly to emphasize different genre/styles, authors and their work, illustrators, book

titles, storyline development, how to prepare for a conference, and a myriad of other options. Yes, the introduction or review of a "skill" would still be appropriate here too, but not as a domain of exclusion.

The planned responses to reading by the students will vary from retellings, answering well pointed questions, writing in journals/logs, expressing themselves in letters, sharing verbally with one another, working in common task groups, spontaneous book talks, and other reflective alternatives. Grouping will range from the whole class to small groups to particular individuals depending upon the strategy selected for the response mode.

The teacher will teach most of the process strategies for reading in the environmental context. The teacher will monitor throughout the allocated reading time offering strategy helps at the point of application during fifteen to twenty second "huddle help" sessions. If these huddle helps are not sufficient, the teacher will organize ad hoc groups for a more lengthy instructional session during an appropriate response time for individuals with common problems.

The written products of the students might be polished for public sharing and serve as reading selections for students as appropriate. The student published written works will be displayed and offered as items for choice in reading materials if the author gives their approval.

4. What types of alternatives can be used in choosing features for an evolving program?

History is not made in a vacuum. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. We need to take the good ideas from current and past programs whenever and wherever appropriate. In developing a reading program of the future, we should retain the better qualities of any past or present pattern into our evolving new creation. It is the molding and shaping of these features into a new way of organizing and teaching that matters for program building.

Current and past practice offers five different, but related, program practices from which we may borrow, modify, adapt, and shape into a new structure. They are the practice of using core books for teaching reading, individualized reading (1950's variety), literature units, whole language or some combination of these four practices.

Individualized reading, as initiated and practiced in the 1950' and early 1960's was predicated on the ideas of seeking, self-selection, self-pacing, and teacher-pupil reading conferences. However, in selecting attributes from this alternative, we must make sure that we have and can maintain structure and control of the classroom situation.

Core programs are a series of novels in which the students are all expected to read the same book at the same time and under the same time frame. Examples of this approach would be all reading the books Durango Street, or Snow Bound or books by the same author in a series. The danger in this alternative is that

of falling into past practices by just substituting literature and teaching it as if it were a basal. Such actions is likely to demean the literature and rendered the material impotent.

A third alternative is literature units which consists of a small set of books related by theme, style, story structure or some other common element. A danger to be avoided in selecting attributes from this approach is that of overanalysis, that is, to do so much literary analysis as to overkill its obvious advantages.

Whole language is a concept and belief system where language is seen as a means of communicating complete or whole messages. It has many strengths which can incorporated into a new model, but it also runs the danger of looking at the forest and not providing nourishment of individual trees. One cannot always remain so global that the specific features of written language are not given appropriate attention.

Undoubtedly, the best approach in putting together a new concept in teaching reading is to use positive ideas from each alternative. Each individual teacher must select and fuse together ideas and techniques which are suitable for their own style and other ways of operating. This may explain why different creations in teaching style may not have a set of common features but still reflect common goals.

5. What changes in our <u>belief system</u> are necessary for constructing the program of the future?

The belief system is the driving force behind any reading program. It may be either explicit or implicit, but in any case,

the assumptions one makes about reading and the reading process are reflected in our teaching practices. We have had over fifty years of basal reading programs that they have become institutionalized in nearly all classes. The reading program of the future will break this strangle-hold. Claims that teachers cannot teach reading without a basal system are largely unfounded - a cop-out! How do we know? Teachers have had little option for over fifty years. Given opportunity, freedom to try, leadership, well pointed staff development, encouragement, and support, most teachers can teach without being procedurally programmed. A new orientation is now possible. We have the knowledge base, materials are readily available, teachers are better prepared than ever before, and in the long run, this new program will be more cost efficient. What we need is the courage to become "risk-takers" ourselves. To do this requires, not more of the same from the past, but a reorientation of our own perspectives and beliefs about reading and how it should and could be taught.

We need to change our dependence on a teacher's manual which is based on a program perspective not on individual performance and development. A shift in the purpose of the lesson must broaden from one of skill development to one of focus development. The teacher dominated two to four group concept (homogeneous grouping) in the same material at a different rate should shift to one of heterogeneous grouping with teacher modeling and monitoring supported with ad hoc grouping as needed by the teaching context. Instead of the reading materials being preselected by outsiders of a school system, we must change to a rich print environment in the classroom where pupils are taught

how to select reading material appropriately and given the responsibility to do so. Teachers will rely upon their own understanding of the reading process with selected tasks for focus development instead of relying on being programmed by editors through the teachers manual. The time frame for the reading lesson based on a three day teaching cycle (plus or minus a day) will be replaced by individual pacing. Lastly, the teaching framework will shift from one of preparation (readiness) for reading to interrogated responses to a new paradigm of request (invitation to read), reading, and a more wide ranging response system by changing the demand. This comparison between the past and future is outlined below in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

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8. What kind of rational <u>teaching model</u> can be created for meeting the requirements of a reading program for the future?

Teachers in the reading program of the future must use their knowledge base and construct a teaching model which is appropriate to their teaching personality. No set of directives written by a group of editors in New York, Chicago, Boston, or elsewhere can really do that for us. Maybe Pogo was right: "We have met the enemy and he is us!"

We must shift from the behavioristic model of the past to a true developmental model. In doing so, we must teach ourselves to think stages, not grade levels. The teaching role becomes one of creating the environment and atmosphere, of leading students,

Table 1. Comparison of the Program of the Past with the Program of the Future

Program of Past	Program of Future
Based on manual plus teacher's advanced appraisal of the	Individual, small groups and whole-class based on individual performance and its development
1. Skill selection	Focus selection
2. Homogeneous grouping	Heterogeneous
3. Basals/Workbooks	Pupil selected
4. Manual directives	Focus development
5. Two-Four day cycles	Individual pacing
6. Rdns/Rdg/Resp.	Request/Rdg/Resp.

mediating between them and the text, and being inductive in our approach. Then we will create an environment where reading becomes a discovery process.

We must teach narrative, expository, and information texts by a rational framework guided by its underlying components, not a teaching guide, a study guide, nor a dominating resources manual. We should take suggestions from several creditable sources and blend them into our teaching style and model, not someone else's directives for our practice.

The program as suggested in this prologue to the Discovery Reading Program (DRP) will provide no guarantee of success, but it

does offer a better probability of a higher quality program with students that can read, who will like to read, and who will likely do so after the program is completed. Such a program will evolve slowly (over three to five years), and have teacher ownership and distinction. It will and can happen when and where teachers are given the curricular freedom to create in a supportive environment. It must happen or the reading program of the future will be the reading program of today and yesterday. Is that what we want?